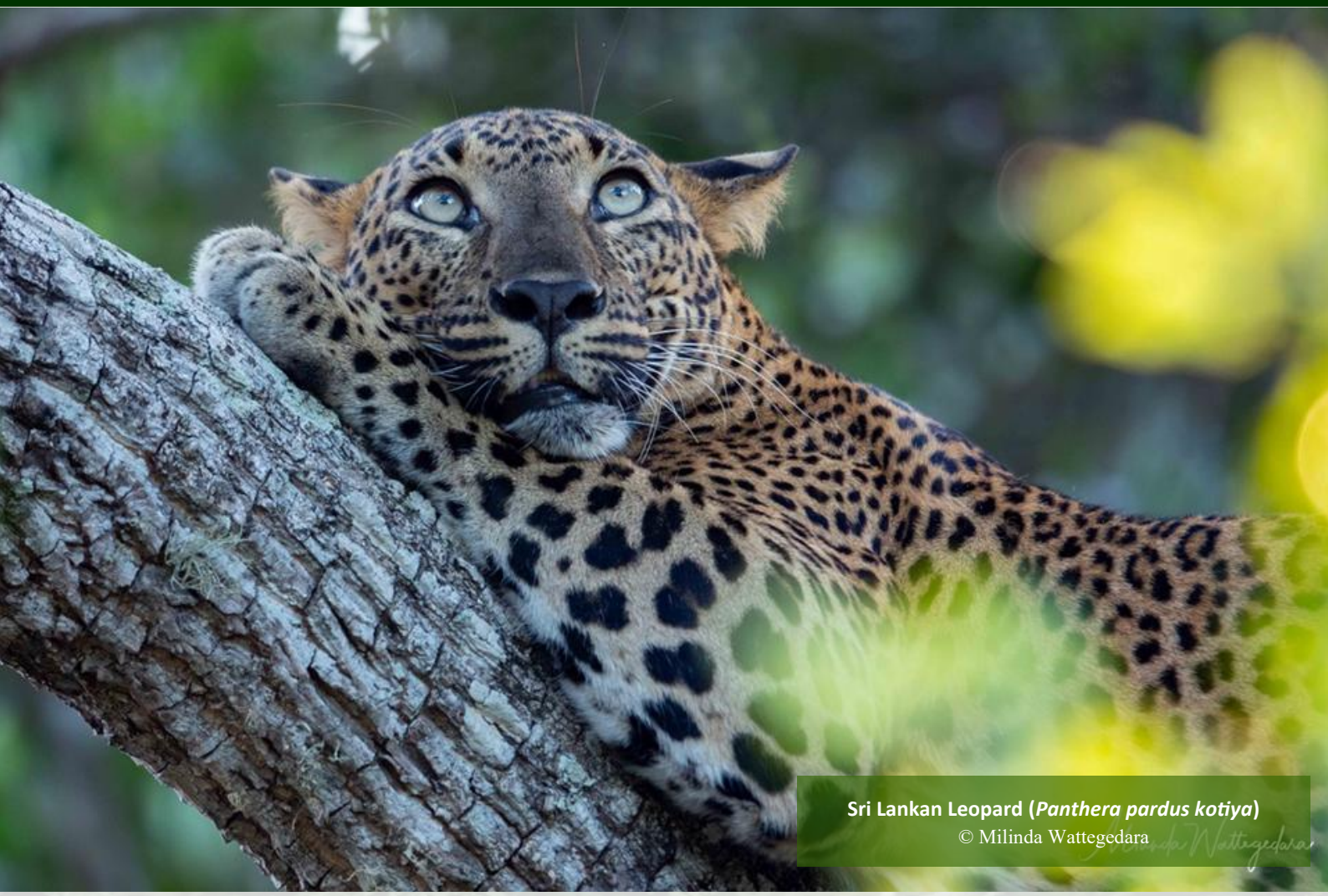
ISSN 3121-441X

Kandy Nature and Wildlife Club

THE KANDY NATURALIST

Newsletter | Volume 01 | Issue 02| September 2026



Sri Lankan Leopard (*Panthera pardus kotiya*)
© Milinda Wattegedara

Cover story

From Sightings to Science: How long-term field photography is uncovering the secret lives, reproductive cycles, and adaptive behaviors of Sri Lanka's coastal leopards.

THE KANDY NATURALIST

PUBLICATION OF THE KANDY NATURE AND WILDLIFE CLUB, SRI LANKA
VOLUME 01 | ISSUE 02 | SEPTEMBER 2026

OFFICE BEARERS

President: Emeritus Professor K.B. Ranawana
Vice President: Dr. Danushka S. Weerasekara (PhD)
Secretary: Mr. Saliya Ambegoda
Assistant Secretary: Dr. Chamith Chandrasekara (BAMS)
Treasurer: Mr. Gajanatha Kobbekaduwe

Committee Members
Mr. Prasanna Abeykoon
Mr. Nissanka Perera
Dr. Chaminda Wijesundara (PhD)

Editorial Board
Emeritus Professor K.B. Ranawana
Dr. Chaminda Wijesundara (PhD)
Dr. Danushka S. Weerasekara (PhD)

Editor-in-Chief: Saliya Ambegoda

The Editorial Board invites submissions of original research papers, short communications, and review articles from KNWC members and the global research community. We welcome scholarly submissions in the fields of natural history, conservation science, biodiversity studies, and local wildlife dynamics. All submissions will undergo an internal review process conducted by members of the Editorial Board. Formatting guidelines and final stylistic decisions remain the prerogative of the Board.

KANDY NATURE AND WILDLIFE CLUB
53A, Rosamund Place, George E. de Silva Mawatha, Kandy, Sri Lanka.
Tel: +94716336260, +94760793322
E-mail: k.n.and.w.c@gmail.com
www.kandynaturalist.org

Scan to join our WhatsApp group

ISSN 3121-441X

Editorial — Page 4

Dr. Danushka S. Weerasekera highlights the club's growth and the role of the newsletter in connecting science, field observations, and local natural history

Cover Story: A Decade with Yala Leopards **— Page 5**

Milinda Watthegedara shares decade-long observations of the Sri Lankan Leopard at Yala

Field Notes: Nesting and Fledging Behavior of the Black-naped Monarch **— Page 11**

Saliya Ambegoda's study of the nesting and fledging of Black-naped Monarch

Wildlife Rescue: The 2009 Panama Leopard Conservation Operation—**Page 16**

Wildlife Veterinarian Dr. Pramuditha Dewasurendra shares his experience on leopard rescue mission

Members Spotlight — Page 22

A photo gallery featuring contributions from the club's Facebook group

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the second issue of *The Kandy Naturalist*. As a society dedicated to promoting the appreciation, understanding, and conservation of Sri Lanka's remarkable natural heritage, the Kandy Nature & Wildlife Club continues to provide a platform where science, conservation, and public engagement come together.

Over the years, our club has grown into a vibrant community of researchers, wildlife enthusiasts, photographers, students, and conservation practitioners who share a common passion for nature. Through field observations, educational programs, conservation initiatives, and public outreach activities, we strive to foster a deeper connection between people and the natural world while encouraging evidence-based conservation.

This issue highlights the diversity of contributions that make our community unique. From the fascinating long-term documentation of Sri Lankan leopards in Yala National Park to detailed observations of bird nesting behavior in an urban garden habitat and an extraordinary account of a wildlife rescue operation carried out under challenging circumstances, each article reflects the value of careful observation, scientific inquiry, and commitment to wildlife conservation.

The publication of *The Kandy Naturalist* represents an important step in documenting and sharing local natural history knowledge. We believe that many valuable observations made by naturalists, photographers, field biologists, and wildlife enthusiasts deserve a wider audience. This newsletter provides a forum for such contributions while encouraging the exchange of ideas and experiences among members and the broader conservation community.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all authors, photographers, reviewers, editorial board members, and club members whose dedication and enthusiasm made this issue possible. I also extend my gratitude to our readers for their continued support and encouragement.

As we move forward, I warmly invite members and contributors to share their observations, research findings, field notes, photographs, and conservation stories for future issues. Together, we can continue building a valuable record of Sri Lanka's biodiversity while inspiring future generations to appreciate and protect our natural heritage.

I hope you enjoy this issue of *The Kandy Naturalist* and find inspiration in the stories, discoveries, and conservation efforts featured within its pages.

Dr. Danushka S. Weerasekera (PhD)
Vice President
Kandy Nature & Wildlife Club

A Decade with Yala Leopards

Milinda Wattegedara
462/4/C, Lake Road, Akuregoda, Battaramulla

Long before I ever lifted a camera, leopards had already captured my imagination. What first drew me to them was not only their beauty, but the complexity of their lives—their movements, hunting strategies, reproductive behavior, and ability to persist in habitats shaped by constant ecological change. Photography gave that curiosity a sharper purpose, becoming a way to observe, document, and better understand the species over time. In this pursuit, Yala National Park has become a place of continual return, where each season offers new insight into the ecology and behavior of one of Sri Lanka's most remarkable predators.

The Apex Predator of the Coastal Scrub

Yala National Park, designated a protected area in 1938, remains one of Sri Lanka's flagship wildlife reserves. It is also the stronghold of the Sri Lankan leopard (*Panthera pardus kotiya*), an endemic subspecies and the island's apex predator. For photographers and wildlife enthusiasts, Block I offers the rare chance to observe leopards across an extraordinary range of habitats—ocean light from the Indian Ocean, rugged rock formations, low branches that become lookout points, and dense scrub jungle—settings that feel uniquely Yala.

Figure 1: YF 03 Haminee and her son YM11 Hitler, January 2015 © Milinda Wattegedara

Figure 2: YF15 Hope climbing down from Rukvila rock in the dawn, March 2015: © Milinda Wattegedara

Figure 3: YM 75 “James” uses a tree as a vantage point, surveying the surrounding landscape. April 2023
© Milinda Wattegedara

Figure 4: YM 16 “Lucas,” among the most frequently documented leopards in Yala Block I, crosses the Gonalabba Plains with the Gonalabba Lagoon and the Indian Ocean beyond. This distinctive coastal landscape makes Yala one of the rare places where a leopard can be observed against an oceanic backdrop. October 2022.
© Milinda Wattegedara

Figure 5: YM 31 “Ruki” demonstrates the strength and coordination of a leopard by securing its prey on a branch, preventing it from slipping. June 2016. © Milinda Wattegedara

From Sightings to Science: The Yala Leopard Diary

For me, a photograph was never the end of the encounter, but the beginning of a deeper probe. Each sighting raised broader ecological questions: how individual leopards used the landscape, how their behavior varied with season, habitat, and circumstance, and what environmental pressures influenced their daily decisions. That curiosity led me to establish the Yala Leopard Diary in 2013 as a long-term effort to document, preserve, and share field-based knowledge on Yala’s leopards across generations.

The diary was established with three primary objectives:

- **Accurate Leopard Identification:** To develop a reliable, cross-referenced knowledge base on Yala’s leopard population for wildlife enthusiasts and researchers.
- **Public Understanding:** To strengthen broader public understanding and awareness of the species through systematic, field-based observation logs.
- **Evidence-Based Conservation:** To support long-term conservation by emphasizing the ecological importance of protecting both this endemic apex predator and its native and dynamic habitat.

I was soon joined by a small group of equally committed enthusiasts, and together we began documenting each encounter by systematically recording date, time, location, habitat, observed behavior, and by taking photographs suitable for individual identification. Between 2013 and 2016, this effort produced a detailed field dataset that allowed us to move beyond anonymous sightings and begin recognizing individual leopards with confidence.

Figure 6: YF 77 “Shelly” in a quiet, attentive moment, assessing her environment. April 2026 © Milinda Wattegedara

This work was further strengthened by community-based reporting. Regular visitors and photographers contributed sightings and images through our social media channels, enabling us to expand spatial coverage across different areas of Block I, compare records more effectively, and improve identification accuracy over time. These collective observations became an important component of the long-term dataset.

Population Dynamics and Lineage Tracking

From 2013 to the present, the Yala Leopard Diary has identified **189 individual leopards** in Yala Block I. Drawing on census work conducted between 2020 and 2025, we recorded leopard density in Block I at **0.524 leopards per km²**, placing Yala among the highest leopard-density landscapes reported worldwide. Each identified leopard is assigned a gender-based code and a running number, followed by a nickname. For example, **YM 20 “Arthur”** is the 20th male recorded in Yala National Park, while **YF 20 “Cara”** is the 20th female. The first photographer to document a new individual is invited to suggest the nickname. Accurate individual identification has also made it possible to trace maternal lineages across three generations, offering valuable insight into the reproductive continuity of Yala’s leopard population. The example below highlights the contribution of **YF 11 “Sara”** to the long-term growth and persistence of leopards within the park.

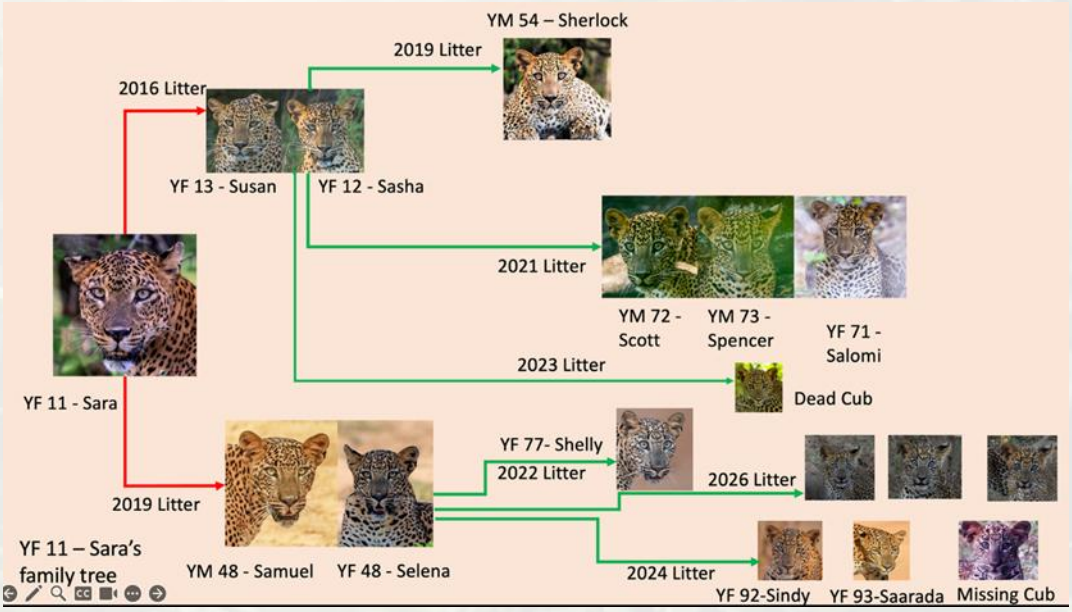


Figure 7: Detailed genealogical chart showing maternal connections starting from YF 11 "Sara"

Establishing a Repository for Global Conservation

Building on this identification work, the research team—Milinda Wattegedara, Dushyantha Silva, Raveendra Siriwardana, and Mevan Piyasena—established the Yala Leopard Center in June 2020, the world's first information center dedicated exclusively to leopards. Located at the Palatupana entrance to Yala National Park, the center serves as a repository of long-term field knowledge, bringing together records on individual leopards, their ecology, and the distinctive behavioral observations documented over years of study.

Figure 8: Information center dedicated exclusively to leopards

Peer-Reviewed Contributions

The research effort has also successfully led to the publication of two peer-reviewed scientific papers:

- Silva, D., Wattegedera, M., Piyasena, M., Siriwardene, R., Hewage, S., Sooriyabandara, M. G. C., Marasinghe, M. S. L. R. P., Nilanthi, R. M. R., Wimaladasa, P., Ranasinghe, G., & Perera, K. (2025). A leopard cub (*Panthera pardus kotiya*) adopted by kin and non-kin leopardesses consecutively. *Ecology and Evolution, 15*(2), e70952. https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.70952
- Wattegedera, M., Silva, D., Sooriyabandara, C., Wimaladasa, P., Siriwardena, R., Piyasena, M., Marasinghe, R. M. S. L. R. P., Hathurusinghe, B. M., Nilanthi, R. M. R., Gunawardena, S., Peiris, H., Seneviratne, P., Sendanayake, P. C., Dushmantha, C., Chandrasena, S., Gooneratne, S. S., Premaratne, P., Wickremaratne, S., & Mahela, M. (2022). A multi-point identification approach for the recognition of individual leopards (*Panthera pardus kotiya). Animals, 12(5), 660.* https://doi.org/10.3390/ani12050660

The Horizon of Discovery

One conclusion has become increasingly clear: our understanding of these leopards remains far from complete. Long-term documentation and individual identification have revealed important patterns in behavior, movement, and population structure, yet many aspects of their ecology remain to be discovered.

The Yala Leopard Diary was never intended as a final account, but as a foundation for deeper inquiry—one that can support knowledge sharing, strengthen public understanding, and inform conservation grounded in evidence. We are only beginning to understand the leopards of Yala, and there is still much to learn about how they live, adapt, and persist within one of Sri Lanka's "most dynamic protected landscapes."

Editor's Note

*Wildlife photography is often celebrated for its visual artistry, but **Milinda Wattegedara**'s work reminds us of its profound potential when paired with scientific discipline. Over more than a decade, the Yala Leopard Diary has transformed casual encounters into an invaluable, peer-reviewed dataset that deepens our global understanding of Sri Lankan leopard. By bridging the gap between art and evidence-based conservation, this body of work perfectly embodies the spirit of our community. We are privileged to feature it as the cover story for this issue.*

Saliya Ambegoda - Secretary, Editor-in-Chief

Observations on nesting and fledgling behavior of Black-naped Monarch (*Hypothymis azurea ceylonensis*) in a home garden habitat in Kandy, Sri Lanka

Saliya Ambegoda

53A, Rosamund Place, George E. de. Silva Mawatha, Kandy, Sri Lanka

Summary

Observations on the nesting behavior, parental care, predator response, and fledging of the Black-naped Monarch (*Hypothymis azurea ceylonensis*) were conducted between 1st to 19th May 2026 in a home garden habitat bordering a small forest patch in Kandy, Sri Lanka (approximately 7.29°N, 80.61°E). The nest was constructed on a small coffee plant (*Coffea arabica*) approximately 140 cm above ground level. The external nest height measured approximately 8 cm, while the cup depth was approximately 3 cm. The inner cup diameter was approximately 3 cm. The nest was positioned within dense vegetation adjacent to a small stream and within close proximity to an active house construction site. Observations documented male-biased incubation and parental care, predator-specific alarm responses, nest sanitation behavior, prey delivery, and successful fledging of three nestlings despite prolonged inter-monsoon rainfall and nearby anthropogenic disturbance.

Keywords: Black-naped Monarch, fledging, nesting behaviour, parental care, Sri Lanka.

Study Area

The observations were conducted in a suburban home garden habitat bordering a small secondary forest patch in Kandy District, Central Province, Sri Lanka. The nesting site was situated approximately two meters from a narrow stream within dense vegetation. Active house construction occurred approximately three meters from the nest throughout the observation period.

Methods

The nest was first located on 1st May 2026. Observations were conducted from a concealed position at an estimated distance of approximately three meters from the nest. Full camouflage methods were employed to minimize disturbance, and no direct handling, vegetation clearing, playback usage, flash photography, or physical approach to the nest was undertaken during the observation period.

Photographs and behavioral observations were made using Nikon D3s and Nikon D7000 camera bodies paired with Sigma 150–600 mm lenses, primarily at 600 mm focal length.

Observations

Nest Site and Nest Measurements

The nest was constructed on a small coffee plant (*Coffea arabica*) at approximately 140 cm above ground level. The external nest height measured approximately 8 cm (Figure 1), while the cup depth was approximately 3 cm (Figure 2). The inner cup diameter was approximately 3 cm.

Figure 1: Nest height © Saliya Ambegoda

Figure 2: Nest depth © Saliya Ambegoda

The nest was positioned within dense vegetation approximately two meters from a narrow stream in a semi-disturbed home garden habitat. Incubation was predominantly performed by the male.

The nest consisted of a compact cup-shaped structure attached securely to a small branch fork of the coffee plant (*Coffea arabica*) (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Nest of Black-naped Monarch, a compact, cup -shaped structure attached securely to a small branch fork © Saliya Ambegoda

External materials appeared to include fine plant fibers, dry vegetation, soft filamentous material, and spider webbing, which likely contributed to structural stability and camouflage (Henry, 1978; Hume, 1889). The outer surface blended closely with surrounding vegetation and was difficult to detect without careful observation.

Incubation Behavior

Both adult birds participated in incubation duties. However, during the observation period, the male was more frequently observed incubating than the female and appeared to contribute substantially to the incubation process (Figure 4). Adult changeovers at the nest were observed periodically throughout the day (Cheow-Lim et al., 2024; Halim, 2024).

Figure 4: Male incubating © Saliya Ambegoda

Nestling Development

Hatching was confirmed on 10th May 2026. By 12th May, the nestlings had partially opened eyes and partially developed wing feathers. On 17th May, the eyes were fully open, while feather development remained incomplete around the head region. By 18th May, the nestlings were partially feathered, and one individual repeatedly attempted to raise itself above the nest rim, indicating imminent fledging behavior.

Feeding Behavior

Both parents participated in feeding the nestlings. However, the male contributed more frequently to parental activities and often remained perched near the nest for extended periods following feeding visits (Figure 5). The female generally departed immediately after feeding (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Male feeding the chicks © Saliya Ambegoda

Figure 6: Female feeding the chicks © Saliya Ambegoda

Observed prey items included dragonflies, butterflies, and other small flying insects, consistent with the species' known insectivorous feeding ecology.

Anti-predator Behavior

Frequent alarm calling and territorial defense behavior were observed in response to the presence of the White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) and the Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*). In contrast, the Black-backed Dwarf Kingfisher (*Ceyx erithaca*) occasionally approached the nesting area without provoking noticeable alarm responses from the adult monarchs.

Nest Sanitation

Nest sanitation behavior included both consumption and removal of fecal sacs (Figure 7). The male parent was observed consuming a fecal sac on one occasion. Both adults were also observed carrying

Figure 7: Fecal sac removal © Saliya Ambegoda

fecal sacs away from the nest area, including across the adjacent stream. During one observation, a fecal sac fell from the nest while the male parent was present nearby.

Weather Conditions

The nesting period coincided with the inter-monsoon season, during which heavy evening rainfall occurred almost daily. Particularly intense rainfall associated with a low-pressure system over the Bay of Bengal occurred between 14th to 17th May 2026. Weather conditions improved on 18th and 19th May, with clear skies and cooler conditions prevailing.

Fledging

On 19th May 2026 at approximately 0930 h, the first nestling fledged successfully followed shortly by a second individual (Figure 8).

Both fledglings initially flew downward into nearby low vegetation before responding to repeated parental calls directing them toward denser cover.

Figure 8: A recent fledgling perched on a branch.

© Saliya Ambegoda

A third nestling remained in the nest until approximately 1130 h. After emerging from the nest, it remained outside for approximately 30 minutes (Figure 9) before making a short downward flight and landing within grassy ground vegetation. Adult contact calls continued throughout the day.

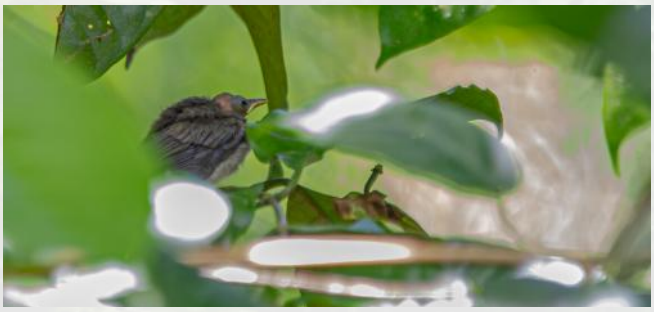


Figure 9: A third nestling, after emerging from the nest

© Saliya Ambegoda

The fledging period observed in this nesting event generally agrees with previously documented nesting timelines for the species (Lok, 2009).

Discussion

The observations document successful fledging of three Black-naped Monarch nestlings within a semi-disturbed habitat exposed to persistent human activity and heavy seasonal rainfall. Despite the proximity of construction activity, the nest remained active throughout the nesting cycle, suggesting a degree of behavioral tolerance to predictable anthropogenic disturbance.

Male-biased parental investment was consistently observed during both incubation and chick-rearing stages. Extended male presence near the nest following feeding visits may additionally indicate a vigilance or nest-guarding role.

Regular removal of fecal sacs by the parents was observed during the study period. This type of nest sanitation behavior is widely regarded as an anti-predator adaptation that minimizes both olfactory and visual cues around the nesting site. By carrying the waste away, the parents effectively reduce the likelihood of attracting predators to the area. This routine serves as a vital investment in offspring survival, keeping the nest's presence as discreet as possible.

The strong alarm response toward the White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) and Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*) suggests recognition of these species as potential nest predators. In contrast, the lack of defensive response toward the Black-backed Dwarf Kingfisher (*Ceyx erithaca*) may indicate species-specific predator assessment based on perceived threat level.

Improved weather conditions immediately preceding fledging may also have contributed to successful fledging activity by providing more favorable flight and foraging conditions. Prior to this clear window, the nesting period was subjected to prolonged inter-monsoon rainfall, which likely challenged parental foraging efficiency. The sudden shift to cooperative weather allowed both the adults and the three nestlings to optimize their energy reserves at a critical developmental juncture. Consequently, the brief period of environmental stability maximized the chicks' chances of successfully leaving the nest despite earlier atmospheric disruptions.

Ethical Note

All observations were conducted using non-invasive field observation methods. A concealed observation position and long-focal-length photography were used throughout the study to minimize disturbance to the nesting birds. No handling of adults or nestlings, playback usage, flash photography, or habitat manipulation was undertaken during the active nesting period.

Nest measurements were obtained only one day following successful fledging of all nestlings to ensure that no disturbance occurred during incubation or chick-rearing stages.

References

Cheow-Lim, L., Ching, K. C., & Neoh, C. K. (2024). Nesting Black-naped Monarchs. *Malaysian Bird Report*, 3. malaysianbird.report

Henry, G.M. (1978). A Guide to the Birds of Ceylon. 2nd Ed. K.V.G. de Silva and Sons, Kandy.

Hume, A. O. (1889). The Nests and Eggs of Indian Birds. (E. W. Oates, Ed.; 2nd Ed). R. H. Porter.

Huzairi Abd Halim. (2024). Nesting of Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea*. *Malaysian Bird Report*, 2. malaysianbird.report

Lok, A. F. S. L. (2009). The Black-naped Monarch (*Hypothymis azurea*) in Singapore. *Nature in Singapore*, 2, 21–25.

Wartime Wildlife Veterinary Rescue: The 2009 Panama Leopard Conservation Operation

Pramuditha Dewasurendra
Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, Kahavita Road, Attidiya, Dehiwala

Location: Ampara Wildlife Region, Eastern Province, Sri Lanka

Editor's Note: This article is presented as an archival field account based on the author's personal experience. The field observations and data were collected during the period of civil conflict in Sri Lanka involving active militant factions, including the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). This note is included to provide international readers with necessary historical context regarding the regional conditions and logistical parameters under which this conservation was conducted.

Summary:

This archival field report documents a high-risk veterinary intervention conducted in February 2009 to rescue a Sri Lankan leopard (*Panthera pardus kotiya*) caught in an illegal wire snare. Executed during the height of the civil conflict in the Eastern Province, the operation required close tactical cooperation between the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) and the Sri Lanka Navy. The account details the specialized medical challenges of remote field immobilization, improvised constraint techniques under immediate tactical threat, and successful wilderness release.

1. Context and Initial Despatch

In February 2009, the active operational landscape of the Ampara wildlife sector presented severe logistical constraints due to intensified military activity. While stationed within the Eastern Wildlife Area, our veterinary team received an urgent dispatch originating from the Sri Lanka Navy Base Camp at Pottuvil. The Base Commander reported that a leopard (*Panthera pardus kotiya*) had been detected vocalizing in acute distress inside a dense stretch of jungle near Panama. Recognizing the critical status of the animal, an immediate emergency deployment was authorized.

Our response team—comprising Veteran Field Officer Lawrence Benjamin, our dedicated staff driver, and select administrative personnel and myself—immediately mobilized and commenced the transit to Pottuvil. Under peacetime conditions, this route is brief; however, during this phase of the civil war, the presence of critical active tactical zones necessitated passing through numerous military checkpoints and army barriers. This heightened security protocol extended the journey to approximately one and a half hours.

Operational Profile: Panama Leopard Rescue	
Date / Period	February 2009
Primary Location	Panama Jungle Sector, Ampara District, Sri
Target Species	Sri Lankan Leopard
Nature of Threat	Wire snare entanglement (intended for wild boar
Cooperating Agencies	Department of Wildlife Conservation & Sri Lanka Navy (Pottuvil Command)
Tactical Command	Lieutenant Nilaveera, Officer-in-Charge (OIC),

2. Tactical Ingress and Active Threat Assessment

Upon arrival at the Pottuvil Base Camp, the Officer-in-Charge (OIC), Lieutenant Nilaveera, finalized the joint coordination plan. Given that the incident site lay roughly two kilometers deep into dense jungle heavily contested by active militant factions (LTTE), standalone civilian operation was impossible. Lieutenant Nilaveera deployed a heavily armed security detail consisting of approximately 25 tactical seamen to provide perimeter defense and escort our specialized team.

The foot ingress into the jungle was led by a local villager who had initially alerted the military after hearing the leopard's distress calls. The operation encountered immediate tactical complications mid-transit: an advance seaman discovered a discarded rubber slipper on the trail—a distinct signature of active insurgent movement in the immediate vicinity. Following a rapid tactical huddle, Lieutenant Nilaveera halted our advance to reassess the perimeter security and reposition his forces.

“I inquired if the operation was compromised. Lieutenant Nilaveera assured us that we could proceed but stated explicitly: ‘Doctor, our window is severely limited. We cannot sustain an open presence here. Execute your veterinary intervention immediately so we can extract our personnel from this zone.’ ”

While the security detachment adapted to the threat by executing wide surveillance screening roughly 100 to 200 meters around us, our medical team pressed forward to stabilize the animal.

3. Veterinary Chemical Immobilization and Field Procedures

Upon approach, the leopard was located thrashing violently inside thick undergrowth, causing severe agitation to the surrounding foliage. The animal's vocalizations indicated supreme stress and exhaustion. A prominent rocky outcrop standing 3 to 6 meters high was situated adjacent to the animal, providing an optimal, elevated vantage point for safe veterinary delivery.

Lawrence Benjamin and I quietly scaled the rock to evaluate the restraint mechanism. The adult leopard was severely entangled around its abdominal region by a heavy metal wire snare, heavily tensioned but fortunately placed within the last several hours, meaning deep tissue necrosis or laceration had not yet manifested.

Figure 1: Leopard severely entangled around its abdominal region by a heavy metal wire snare. © Pramuditha Dewasurendra

Due to historical equipment constraints, specialized low-impact tranquilizer rifles tailored for small or medium felids were unavailable; our field kit exclusively carried heavy-caliber injection rifles typically reserved for wild elephants. These long-range projection systems exert substantial impact force, which carries an inherent risk of causing severe localized impact trauma or hematomas upon dart injection. To mitigate this risk and safeguard the animal's life under rapid extraction timelines, we intentionally prepared a highly conservative, minimal dosage of the anesthetic compound.

The dart was deployed successfully. Within several minutes, the animal exhibited clear physiological indicators of initial sedation and light drowsiness. However, due to our highly conservative dosing strategy, the leopard maintained partial consciousness and sensory responsiveness. Complete surgical anesthesia was bypassed to protect the animal from potential cardiovascular depression caused by baseline shock, and to prevent mortality from unmonitored recovery timelines in a hostile military zone.

4. Emergency Countermeasures and Successful Extraction

Because the animal retained visual awareness and defensive reflexes, approaching within physical touching distance presented a life-threatening hazard. To neutralize this danger, it was critical to occlude the animal's vision. Lacking proper veterinary blindfolds in our emergency kit, Officer Lawrence Benjamin voluntarily removed his civilian shirt to serve as an improvised visual block, successfully wrapping it around the felid's head to calm its defensive tracking response.

Figure 2: Field Officer Lawrence Benjamin utilizes his removed shirt as an improvised visual block over the leopard's head.

© Pramuditha Dewasurendra

With the leopard's sight obscured, our team approached alongside the driver to carefully sever and dismantle the tensioned wire snare. Diagnostic palpation of the abdominal wall confirmed that the wire had not penetrated the dermal layers or ruptured internal organs. The team rapidly administered a preventative medical regimen consisting of long-acting analgesics for pain management, broad-spectrum antibiotics to neutralize opportunistic infections, and specialized multi-organ recovery supportive fluids.

Figure 3: After the successful removal of the wire snare. © Pramuditha Dewasurendra

Following the completion of medical treatment, all non-essential personnel and the navy security detail were ordered to extract to a safer distance to avoid triggering a post-sedation predatory attack. Lawrence, the driver, and I administered the targeted pharmacological reversal agent (antidote).

We retreated rapidly to the rocky vantage point and monitored the animal's recovery phase via binoculars. Within minutes, the reversal agent successfully metabolized. The leopard regained full consciousness, evaluated its immediate surroundings, and gradually tested its physical coordination. Upon realizing the restrictive tension of the snare was completely gone, the animal executed a powerful leap into the deep jungle brush, successfully returning to the wild.

Figure 4 :Wildlife rescue team and the supporting naval security © Pramuditha Dewasurendra

Once we returned to the Navy camp after the successful rescue operation, the Navy Officer-in-Charge informed us that the finding of the rubber slipper was a definite signal of active terrorist activity near that area. He revealed that this critical security detail had been intentionally withheld from us during the extraction phase, thinking that the wildlife team might become afraid and compromise the speed of the rescue.

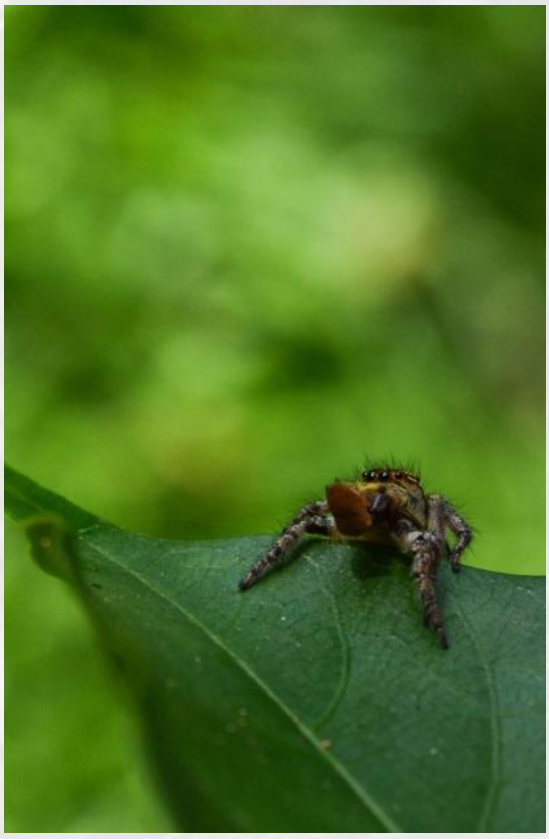
Photo gallery from our FB group

Sri Lanka whistling thrush (Male) © Gajanatha Kobbekaduwe

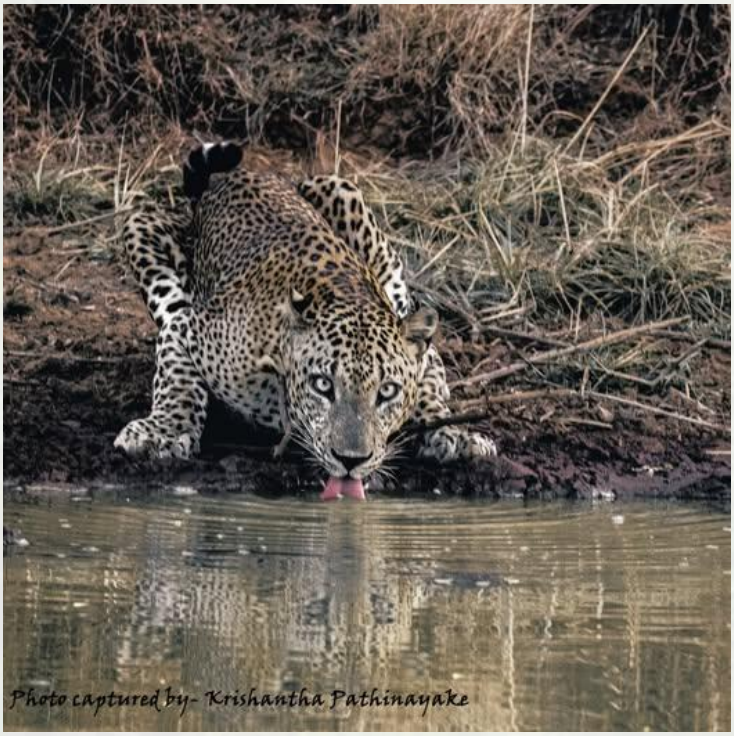
Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl © Lakmin Chanditha

Wild Elephant © Ganga Dias

Sri Lankan Leopard © Lakmin Chanditha



Jumping spider © Janith Madushan



Sri Lankan Leopard © Krishantha Pathinayake

Red weaver ant © Janith Madushan

Sri Lanka whistling thrush (Female) © Chamith Chandrasekara

Malabar Pied Hornbill © Krishantha Pathinayake

Serendib scops owl © Chamith Chandrasekara